

VZCZCXR09121

PP RUEHC/HI RUEHDM RUEHHM RUEHNH

DE RUEHGP #0553/01 0550345

ZNY CCCCC ZZH ZFR

P 240345Z FEB 06

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8889

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2075

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1586

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1460

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3808

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5267

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1250

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 6340

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 000553

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON SN

SUBJECT: EAP DAS ERIC JOHN'S MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER
YEO

Classified By: EP Counselor Laurent Charbonnet. Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister George Yeo and EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John conducted a tour d'horizon of Southeast Asia during their February 9 meeting. FM Yeo said the United States' engagement with Indonesia was vital and he welcomed the resumption of U.S. ties with the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI). On Burma, Minister Yeo expressed his frustration with the regime, commenting that while the rest of ASEAN was moving forward, Burma was moving backwards. With the rise of China and India, FM Yeo stressed the importance of the United States continuing to play the role of "benign superpower" in Southeast Asia. Vietnam, in particular, was interested in being able to use the United States (and Japan) "to play off" of China. DAS John said the President and Secretary would be more engaged with ASEAN this year and we looked forward to working with Singapore as our dialogue partner on the ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership. End Summary.

¶2. (U) During his February 8-11 visit to Singapore, EAP DAS Eric John, accompanied by the Ambassador, met with Foreign Minister George Yeo on February 9. Septel will report DAS John's meetings with other GOS officials.

Indonesia

¶3. (C) Reviewing USG priorities in Southeast Asia, DAS John told Minister Yeo that Indonesia was the most important -- we wanted to build on last year's sea change in our policy. He noted that some members of Congress remained opposed to the resumption of military ties with the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) and would be watching progress on TNI reform and East Timor reconciliation closely. Minister Yeo welcomed the resumption of ties; while Indonesian President Yudhoyono "could be more active," he had the country moving in the right direction. Indonesia was a "big part of the regional puzzle" and FM Yeo said it was vital for the United States to be engaged actively with it. He asserted that Indonesia was not well disposed to China and was evaluating the impact of China's rise on its own economic development, investment and energy needs.

Burma

¶4. (C) Expressing his frustration with Burma, FM Yeo said the

rest of ASEAN was moving forward, but Burma was moving backward. He was not optimistic that any positive change would occur there soon -- by giving up its chairmanship of ASEAN, Burma had no more incentives to behave. He added that, "we are tired of defending them; they don't treat us as a member of the family." Singapore would not, however, cut its links with Burma. Minister Yeo said it was understandable that Indian President Kalam had to visit Burma; it was a vital buffer state between India and China.

China and India

¶ 15. (C) Taking up a familiar GOS theme, FM Yeo observed that China and India were rapidly making up for lost time and were joining the international community. In Southeast Asia, Singapore needed to "carve out space" for itself and to engage both of these rising powers. To that end, it helped if other powers, notably the United States, were also active.

Singapore always feared that the United States would lose interest in Southeast Asia and allow "small problems" to cloud the big picture. China was active both bilaterally with ASEAN countries and multilaterally. The stronger China grew, however, the more ASEAN countries would want the United States to keep playing the role of "benign superpower."

Vietnam

¶ 16. (C) The leadership in Vietnam was smart and disciplined, observed FM Yeo. Vietnam could not afford to offend its larger neighbor, China. Vietnam thus wanted to attract the

SINGAPORE 00000553 002 OF 002

United States' interest, which would enable it "to play off" China against the United States as well as Japan. Minister Yeo claimed that Vietnam was also "keen" on ASEAN integration. DAS John commented that Vietnam had methodically built its relationship with the United States over the last decade. While the pace had been slow at times, there was never any backtracking. The President's visit to Hanoi for the APEC Summit in November provided a useful tool to advance our ties this year.

Cambodia

¶ 17. (C) Democratic development remained a challenge in Cambodia, observed DAS John, though the pardon and return to Cambodia of opposition party leader Sam Rainsy was a positive development. Commenting on his recent trip to Cambodia, FM Yeo said he had urged Prime Minister Hun Sen to do a better job managing his ties with the U.S. Congress. When he suggested to Hun Sen that he send FUNCINPEC leader Prince Ranariddh as an envoy to Congress, Yeo said a "horrified" expression came across his face.

ASEAN

¶ 18. (C) The President came away from last November's meeting at APEC with the seven ASEAN leaders enthusiastic about building ties with ASEAN, noted DAS John. Reflecting this, the President and the Secretary would be more engaged with ASEAN this year. The USG looked forward to working with Singapore as its ASEAN dialogue partner to move forward on the ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership, which should put U.S.-ASEAN ties on a qualitatively different level.

Commenting on USG attendance at last year's ASEAN Post-Ministerial meeting in Vientiane, FM Yeo said that ASEAN should have been pleased with the Deputy Secretary's participation, given his work in opening up trade ties with the region. For many ASEAN members, however, symbols were more important than substance.

~~¶~~9. (U) DAS John has cleared this message.
HERBOLD